

Kensington Plantation
U.S. Route 601
Eastover Vicinity
Richland County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-129

HABS
SC
40-1851
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

KENSINGTON PLANTATION

HABS No. SC-129

Location: US Route 601 near Eastover, Richland
County, South Carolina.

UTM: 17,535550
.37470

	Latitude	Longitude
NW	33°47'10.3"	80°38'31.95"
NE	33°47'10.3"	80°38'25.43"
SE	33°46'55.05"	80°38'25.43"
SW	33°46'55.05"	80°38'31.95"

Present Owner: Union Camp Corporation

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

Present Use: None

Statement of
Significance:

One of a number of plantations founded by the Singleton family in the early 1800's, the Kensington Plantation is known for the architectural significance of the main house and was nominated to the National Record of Historic Places in 1970. The main house, built by Matthew Richard Singleton in the early 1850's, is unique in its bold expression of French-inspired forms and detailing.

Kensington, with its 3000 acres, was typical of Southern plantations of the period, having a number of secondary buildings which supported the daily life of the plantation. Accessory buildings at Kensington included slave quarters, overseers residence, animal barns, equipment storage, crop storage outbuildings, a plantation store (commissary) and a summer kitchen for the main house. Except for the plantation store and summer

kitchen, all of the 19th century secondary structures have been lost. These two small, woodframe structures in deteriorating condition describe the vernacular style of architecture common to accessory buildings on the plantation.

Stabilization and partial rehabilitation of the Kensington House is scheduled to begin in 1983. Deteriorating outbuildings, including the summer kitchen, plantation store, the Matthew Singleton residence and the Lanham residence are to be demolished during the rehabilitation effort.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Kensington Plantation was one of several plantations acquired by Matthew Singleton, who died in 1787, willing the property to his son, John. By the time the family holdings had been passed on to John's son, Richard, they consisted of over 12,000 acres of prime cotton land on both sides of the Wateree River. Matthew Richard, Richard Singleton's heir, moved to the "Headquarters" plantation after a tour of duty in Europe as a military attache. In 1844, after his marriage, the plantation was renamed "Kensington" and the house and grounds were improved. The Kensington House was completed in 1855 after Matthew Richard's death at the age of 38 and was occupied by his wife, children and his wife's mother during the Civil War. Unlike many plantation houses, Kensington survived the Civil War. Richard and Cleland Singleton, his children, divided the plantation acreage in half. Cleland built another small house on the southern half of the plantation, probably in the 1870's-80's. That house subsequently served as the overseer's residence from 1925 to 1941 and has since burned down. Matthew Richard Singleton, Richard Singleton's heir, constructed a small residence around the turn of the century to the northeast of the main house. The untimely death of this heir precipitated Richard's decision to retire from country life and the plantation was sold to

Robert Hamer of Dillon, South Carolina. Although Mr. Hamer died before moving in, his son, R.C. and family occupied the main house and farmed the lands until 1941. In 1925, upon the death of Cleland Singleton, the Hamers repurchased the southern half of the original plantation. Many improvements were made to the house during the Hamer occupancy, including the installation of indoor plumbing and electricity and a gas powered well pump to take the place of the original brick cistern in the basement. In 1941, the Hamers sold the entire plantation to the U.S. Government as an agricultural cooperative for displaced farmers. Unfortunately, the government's priorities were shifted due to the advent of World War II and the plantation was sold to the Lanham family. The Lanhams chose not to live in the main house, but constructed a smaller residence to the west. The Kensington House and surrounding outbuildings have been used as storage for farm equipment, fertilizer and feed since that time.

2. Date of Erection: 1844 - 1855. It is a widely accepted theory that the original farmhouse of the Headquarters Plantation was utilized in the construction of the Kensington House, by dividing the original farmhouse in half and inserting the domed central portion and vaulted dining room wing. There is, however, no concrete evidence to support this theory.
3. Architect: Although the house has been attributed to the firm of Lee and Jones of Charleston, South Carolina, this has not been confirmed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The first Matthew Singleton and his son, John, served under Francis Marion in the Revolutionary War. Matthew was a captain of Horse Company, while his son was a lieutenant under him. "Colonel" Richard Singleton, John's son, was a leading member of the family, having not only increased the family holdings to six plantations in Sumter and Richland Counties, but as the founder and leading stockholder in the South Carolina Railroad Company, the first commercial railroad in America. His efforts for the railroad were rewarded

with the construction of the Acton station on his property. His daughter, Angelica, married Abram Van Buren, son of the President of the United States in 1838. Because Martin Van Buren was a widower, Angelica took on the duties of hostess at the White House. "Colonel" Richard Singleton's youngest children were twins, Matthew and Richard. When Richard died, at the age of 16, his twin brother added Richard's name to his own, thereby becoming Matthew Richard. Matthew Richard was appointed as military attache to the American mission in London and upon his return to the plantations, began a scientific study of agricultural practice. He is attributed to have been the first person to import and raise African broad-tailed sheep in the United States. After his death in 1855, his wife, mother-in-law and son, Richard, continued to live at Kensington. During the Civil War, his wife's mother, Mrs. Mary Loundes Kinloch, was able to save the plantation from burning by Union soldiers, by appealing to the soldier's memories of his own grandmother. Among important guests at the plantations was General Wade Hampton, who began his honeymoon there. Richard Singleton served one term in the S.C. State Legislature, but was swept out of office in the rise of the populist movement. Upon the death of his son, Matthew Richard, in 1910, he sold the plantation to Robert Hamer.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built in the 1850's and one of the few plantations to survive the Civil War, Kensington House is noted for its unique, French-inspired form and detailing and for its polychromy.
2. Condition of fabric: The structural system is basically sound, although the storage of heavy farming materials on the first floor has caused some damage to the floor system at that level. Many years of neglect have resulted in the loss of glazing at the windows and skylight, causing serious damage to the decorative plaster and wood flooring in limited areas. Lighting fixtures and fireplace mantels have been removed and sold.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The domed, 3-story central portion of the house is flanked by two gabled 3-story wings and a 2-story gabled wing with veranda on the east side of the house. The residence measures 85'-6" x 72'-1" with an arched porte cochere at the entrance from the oval drive.
2. Foundations: Masonry and river rock (sandstone) comprise the foundations of the house.
3. Structural system: The framing is composed of cypress heavy timbers.
4. Wall construction: At the ground level, walls are constructed of brick and covered with stucco. Upper floors are framed and sided with a cypress clapboard siding. Research suggests that the body of the house and columns were originally painted a purplish-brown, the dome, roofs and wood trim were maroon, and the shutters peacock green. Yellow-gold accents were applied to the columns and balustrades.
5. Porches: A porte-cochere covers the entry at the west side of the building. The porte was originally surmounted with a wooden balustrade. The arcade created is formed by semi-circular arches alternating with square paneled pilasters topped with ram's head capitals. The capitals and balustrade are presently missing. Flanking either side of the porte cochere are smaller arched porches with flat roofs, accessible from the parlors and bedrooms on the first floor. Although similar to the porte cochere in appearance, these smaller arches spring directly from short square columns and are partially infilled with a heavy, wooden balustrade. The south porch has been closed in. The rear porch also forms an arcade, with a high center arch. The planking of the floor of the veranda has a radiating pattern with a central focus. Surrounding the veranda was a heavy wooden balustrade and a central double flight of stairs to the garden below.
6. Chimneys: The house presently has six brick chimneys covered with stucco.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways: The main doorway from the porte cochere is recessed in the central body of the house and is located at the top of 13 granite steps. A mahogany door is set between side lights and topped by the family coat-of-arms carved in the door frame. The remainder of the exterior doors are very simple, wood-trimmed openings.
- b. Windows and Shutters: Wood, single hung windows are standard six over six lights at all three levels of the house. Wooden bars and heavy paneled shutters on the ground floor protected storerooms and work areas. Upper floors had louvered shutters.

8. Roof:

Shape and covering: The central portion of the house has a French empire dome covered with seamed metal roofing, as are the three gabled wings and various shed roofs of the building. A heavy wooden balustrade originally lined the widows walk at the top of the dome and the roof of the porte cochere.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plan:

- a. Ground Floor: The ground floor housed the many functional systems of the house including a winter kitchen, storerooms, a 45' long brick cistern to hold rainwater, and quarters for the house servants. The ceiling was at 8'-0" above the brick floor. The lower floor nearly is level with the exterior grade.
- b. First Floor: Entering the house from the porte cochere, there is a large central entry, open two stories to the skylight at the top of the dome. Two parlors flank the main hall to the right and left. Directly ahead, a short passageway to the dining room

contains six niches for sculpture. The dining room beyond (27 x 14') has a coffered barrel vaulted ceiling with an enormous chandelier medallion. Floor to cornice windows lead to the veranda. Transverse halls at the main entry hall provide access to bedrooms, a library, serving pantry and a closed stairway to the second floor. Original decorative motives included cast plaster cornices and decorations, flocked wallpaper at the ceilings of the two parlors and plain marble mantels.

- c. Second Floor: Cast iron railing surrounded a large open well to the entry hall. The railing has been removed and reused on the exterior porch of the Lanham residence. Small hallways to the north and south of the sitting room balcony each provide access to two bedrooms and a dressing room. Two small rooms to the east were converted into bathrooms about 1920. There is a stairway inside the dome structure accessible from the bedrooms. The interior of the dome is ornamented with cast plaster decoration.
2. Stairways: The stairs from the ground floor through the second floor are narrow, wooden steps located in a separate closet off the entry hall.
3. Flooring: The ground floor is paved predominantly in standard brick pavers except for the large central storeroom which contains square brick pavers measuring 8" x 8". The upper floors have wooden planked floors.
4. Walls and ceiling finishes: The walls, plaster on lath, are presently painted white and the wood trim at the windows a slate blue. Ceilings in the two front parlors had green and white flocked wall paper adorning them. Cast plaster cornice trim varied from leaf and grape motif in the entry hall and dining room to a guilloche design in the more private rooms.
5. Doors and doorways: On the lower floor, the heavy doors measured 4'-0" wide and had round holes at the bottom to allow cats into the house after

rodents. The upper floors had paneled doors. Arched openings to the three halls are trimmed in heavy plaster moldings although the door trim itself is very simple and flat.

6. Hardware: Many of the doors are missing and few still have original hardware.
7. Lighting: All original light fixtures have been removed. Most of the electrical light fixtures from the period when the house was converted to electricity also do not remain. Presently the house is temporarily lit by several flood lamps installed by the present owner.
8. Heating: Originally heated by wood fires, all but one of the original plain marble mantels have been sold. The house is presently unheated.

D. Site:

1. Setting and orientation: The original 3000 acres of land the plantation contained has been combined with adjacent properties to form the tract presently held by Union Camp. Approximately 250 acres surrounding the plantation house was included in the National Register of Historic Places nomination. The entrance and porte cochere of the main house face slightly south of west. To the east, there is a view across the river, which is approximately 1-1/2 miles away.
2. Landscaping and roads: The main plantation avenue from US Route 601 measures approximately one mile long and is lined on both sides with mature oak trees. It ends in an large oval drive in front of the main house. The original formal gardens on the east of the house were laid out in a spoke design and contained both native and exotic trees including water oak, magnolia, cedar, haw and holly. There was a boxwood-bordered formal garden and a rose garden. Other shrubbery included lilacs and syringia. These gardens have been removed and leveled for cultivation. Open woods are located to the north of the house. From the oval drive, the main plantation street takes off to the south, past the plantation store and pecan orchard to the slave and servant quarters, barns and overseer's house.

Another drive to the north was lined in box and led from the oval drive to the Matthew Singleton residence, constructed around 1900. To the east is a road leading to the river, however it may not be original.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The title and location drawing of the plantation was undertaken by Preservation/Urban/Design/Incorporated, Michael L. Quinn, A.I.A., directing, with Valerie Sivinski, project architect, in December 1982. Research data, previously accumulated in 1980 by Triad Architectural Associates, under the direction of John Califf, was utilized in the preparation of these documents. The project was completed for the Union Camp Corporation, owner of the property, as a requirement of the Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, dated March, 1982.